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Articles in Today's Clips Monday, October 22, 2007

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Child custody caution

Grand Rapids Press Editorial

Saturday, October 20, 2007

Why? That's the main question state Child Protective Services officials must answer in probing the death of a 9-year-old Montcalm County boy, who was left in the care of an admitted child abuser.

Why was the child left with a father who recently admitted abusing his two older sons and was facing jail time for that crime? Why was he left in the home over objections from the local prosecutor's office and seeming common sense?

Young Nicholas Braman's body was discovered Tuesday along with his father's and step mother's in what police are calling a murder/suicide. Investigators believe Oliver Braman, 46, hooked a hose from his truck's exhaust pipe and pumped poisonous gas into the Douglass Township house Sunday night. Both adults and the child had ingested large amounts of nighttime pain relievers. Oliver Braman pled guilty in September to using an electric cattle prod to discipline his teenage sons. The two boys, ages 14 and 15, fled the home and went to live with their mother in Saginaw. Nicholas was not removed from the home because the abuse allegations did not specifically involve him. His mother was seeking to regain custody of the boy.

A probe by the Michigan Department of Human Services and its Office of Family Advocate must answer troubling questions surrounding this case and determine if department practices and policies need changing. Certainly there ought not be a rush to judgment in assessing blame. However, there needs to be a thorough assessment of how this case was handled. Every action and decision made must be examined.

Is it standard operating procedure to leave children in homes where abuse has occurred, even if that child has not yet been a victim? How much weight is given to concerns from law enforcement officials in child abuse cases?

What options do law officials have if they disagree with a decision made by child protection officials?

An assistant Montcalm County prosecutor urged protective services workers to remove Nicholas from his father's home, but to no avail. An e-mail from a child welfare worker less than two hours before Nicholas' body was found

reiterated that the boy was not at risk and that the father was attending parenting classes.

It is unrealistic to believe that CPS workers will make the right call all the time in every case. The state's 840 case workers investigate 70,000 abuse and neglect allegations a year. They are human and humans sometimes make mistakes. But mistakes in which children die merit special scrutiny, especially where there are so many apparent red flags leading up to the incident.

Determining what went wrong for 9-year-old Nicholas, and why, can be important to preventing similar senseless tragedies in the future.



Boy among 3 found dead left note suggesting he wanted to die

10/20/2007, 3:40 p.m. ET

The Associated Press

DOUGLASS TOWNSHIP, Mich. (AP) — A 9-year-old son of a self-employed truck driver who used a combination of an over-the-counter pain medication and carbon monoxide gas to kill his new wife, the boy and himself left a note before he died.

Police believe Nicholas Elmer Braman, who suggests in the note that he wanted to die, wrote the note under his father's influence, The Grand Rapids Press and The Daily News of Greenville reported Saturday.

"I will not be taking (sic) from my mom and dad!!!!!! ... I take care of my mom and dad just like they take care of me."

The note was signed, "From Elmer Braman to everyone."

The Daily News said it used the Freedom of Information Act to get the note. The newspapers said the documents also included a log of the doses of nighttime cold tablets taken by all three.

"My opinion is that a 9-year-old would never have done something like that on their own," Montcalm County Sheriff Bill Barnwell said. "I don't believe Nicholas understood what the significance of his actions."

"If his father or stepmother had somehow survived we would have sought murder charges against them for Nicholas' death."

A suicide note left by Oliver Wayne Braman, 46, in his Douglass Township home indicated that Nancy Elaine Kaczor-Braman was a "willing" participant, the sheriff's department said earlier in the week.

She and his son were given a large amount of Tylenol PM sometime last Sunday before Oliver Braman used duct tape to attach a hose from his extended cab pickup to a dryer vent leading to a bedroom where the family slept on a mattress, officials said.

Nancy Kaczor-Braman, 43, and Oliver Braman were married in early September, officials said.

Witnesses arriving at the home about 55 miles northwest of Grand Rapids on Tuesday turned off the pickup. Autopsy results released Friday showed all three had died of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Oliver Braman pleaded guilty last month to a charge of felony child abuse after authorities said he used an electric cattle prod on two teenage sons. He failed to appear in court on Monday in connection with the child abuse charge.

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'Game over,' boy's suicide log says

Saturday, October 20, 2007

By John Agar

Copyright The Grand Rapids Press

MONTCALM COUNTY -- A 9-year-old boy who was found dead along with his father and stepmother earlier this week left a suicide note claiming he wanted to be with his parents "forever and ever."

"I will not be (taken) from my Mom and Dad!!!!!! ever. I'm going to stay with them forever and ever and ever and ever with them now. I take care of my mom and dad just like they take care of me."

The note was signed, "From Elmer Braman to everyone."

In child-like writing and full of misspellings, the heart-wrenching note was one of a few papers found with the bodies of Nicholas "Elmer" Braman, 9, his father, Oliver Braman, 46, and stepmother Nancy Kaczor-Braman, 43, in their Stanton-area home Tuesday, authorities said.

The Press obtained copies of the crime-scene documents, which also included a log of the huge doses of nighttime cold tablets taken by all three as carbon monoxide was pumped into the home by a pickup left running outside.

Police believe the boy wrote the note under his father's influence.

While its wording suggests the fourth-grader willingly participated in a triple suicide, Montcalm County Sheriff Bill Barnwell said, given the boy's age, he could not possibly have comprehended his father's disastrous plan. The sheriff's office labeled the crime a murder-suicide.

Autopsy results released Friday showed all three had died of carbon monoxide poisoning.

The deaths triggered a state investigation into why the 9-year-old still was in his father's care. Braman had pleaded guilty to two charges of attempted second-degree child abuse for using an electric cattle prod on two of his older sons and awaited a jail sentence next month on the high-court misdemeanor. After the August assault, the older boys ran away from home in the middle of the night and are living with their mother in Saginaw.

A judge ordered Braman to have no contact with the older boys -- Oliver, 14, and Tyler, 15 -- but the 9-year-old stayed behind with his dad and stepmom. The older boys believed they protected their younger brother by leaving but are haunted that they couldn't get him out. He was sleeping in his stepmother's bed the night they fled.

An assistant Montcalm County prosecutor was concerned about the youngest boy's safety and urged Children's Protective Services to remove him from the home because "abuse to one child is abuse to all."

A protective services worker told authorities: "We've never felt that Nicholas was at risk."

Court officials were familiar with Braman. He had waged bitter battles with two ex-wives over custody and visitation for his six children.

The sheriff believes Oliver Braman planned the deaths because he faced incarceration. A warrant was issued for his arrest after he skipped a presentence investigation appointment Monday. An ex-wife,

Rebecca Jasinski, had just filed for custody of the 9-year-old. She figured he got the papers Saturday.

The handwritten log found in the Braman home showed the tragedy began to unfold late Sunday. It indicated the couple overdosed on 56 nighttime cold tablets over a 90-minute period. Elmer took 59, but his were lesser in strength.

They started at 11:35 p.m., with five each. Ten minutes later, they took another five. They doubled the dose at midnight. They took the last pills at 1 a.m., according to the log.

Two hours later, as a pickup outside their home spewed deadly carbon monoxide into their bedroom, someone wrote in the log: "1:45 (a.m.) Game over," and noted a counselor who had worked with the family could explain. "(Our) love and bond is greater than anytime," the log said.

Also found at the scene was a last will and testament form stating their wishes that no one be notified of their deaths until after their cremation. They wanted their remains kept together in a single urn.

The deceased couple also wanted their clothes and personal possessions cremated. It designated placement of remains -- "to keep safe and warm" -- and is signed, Mrs. Nancy Braman, Mr. Oliver Wayne Braman and Elmer Braman.

The one-page note from the 9-year-old was the most personal of the documents found at the scene. In it, the boy appears to be defending his father.

"My dad is the greatest dad. He should not go to jail. ... My dad did not overreact when he used the cattle prode on their butts. It wasn't a hunderd times. It was ten times. I (k)now cause I counted."

Chad Campbell, a counselor for Community Hope Christian Counseling and Mental Health Center who was named in the log, said Friday night he was unaware of the papers left behind.

He could not comment on his work with the family, but said: "To say that it's a tragedy is a huge understatement."

Elmer's note

Following is the suicide note police say 9-year-old Nicholas "Elmer" Braman wrote under his father's influence. The Press is redacting the final two sentences out of sensitivity to survivors.

"To - Everyone

From - Elmer Braman

My Dad !! Is the Greatest Dad !! He should not go to jail!!! And Tyler and Oliver are liars!! What they really did was tell my Grandma they can get her In her sleep, or go in the Ground or end up like Grandpa. (Oliver and Tyler said that !!!!!!!) They throw their fist at her and almost hit her nose or face. My Dad did not over react when he used the cattle prode on their butts. It wasn't a hunderd times. It was ten times. I now cause I counted them. I will not be taking from my Mom and Dad !!!!!!! ever. I'm going to stay with them for ever and ever and ever and ever with them now. I take care of my mom and dad Just like they take care of me. And Nancy Braman as always been my real mom. ...

From Elmer Braman

to everyone"

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Saturday, October 20, 2007

9-year-old son defends father

Ryan Jeltema
Staff Writer

Saturday, October 20, 2007

DOUGLASS TOWNSHIP - Nicholas "Elmer" Braman defended his father in a note addressed to "everyone" uncovered inside the Douglass Township home where he was found dead Tuesday along with his father, Oliver Wayne Braman, and stepmother, Nancy Elaine Kaczor-Braman, in an apparent murder-suicide scheme.

The 9-year-old described Oliver Braman, 46, as "the greatest dad" in a one-page note that The Daily News obtained from the Montcalm County Sheriff's Office on Friday through the Freedom of Information Act. That is despite Oliver Braman entering a guilty plea on Sept. 24 in 64B District Court in Stanton for using a cattle prod to discipline his oldest two sons, Tyler and Oliver Braman.

"He shouldn't go to jail and Tyler and Oliver are liars," Nicholas Braman wrote by hand on a plain sheet of paper. "What they did was tell my gran they can get her in her sleep or go in the ground or end up like grandpa. They throw (sic) their fist at and almost hit her at the nose or face."

Nicholas Braman wrote that accounts of his father's use of a cattle prod were exaggerated.

"My dad did not over react when he used the cattle prod on their butts," he wrote. "It wasn't a hundred times. It was ten times. I now (sic) 'cause I counted them."

Nicholas Braman also stated that he did not want to be removed from his father's custody and be placed with his biological mother Rebecca "Beck" Jasinski of Saginaw like his two older brothers.

"I will not be taking (sic) from my mom and dad!!!!!!!" he wrote. "I'm going to stay with them forever and ever and ever and ever with them. Now I care of my mom and dad just like they take care of me. And Nancy Braman as (sic) always been my real mom.

"If I go back (to Saginaw) Oliver and Tyler will bet (sic) me up and Rebecca will yell at me," Nicholas Braman wrote. "They will do that!!!!!"

Montcalm County Sheriff Bill Barnwell doubts the youngster was a willing participant.

"My opinion is that a 9-year-old would never have done something like that on their own," he said on Friday. "I don't believe Nicholas understood the significance of his actions. If his father or stepmother had somehow survived we would have sought murder charges against them for Nicholas' death."

Another chilling handwritten note supposedly written by Oliver Braman details the final moments of the three victims' lives.

A log dated Oct. 14 begins at 11:35 p.m. indicating Oliver and Nancy Braman consumed 300 milligrams, which Montcalm County Sheriff Bill Barnwell believes is Tylenol PM sleeping pills. It indicates Nicholas Braman, who is referred to as Elmer, started with 100 milligrams.

In entries at 11:35 and 11:45 p.m., all three took five pills each. At midnight they took 10 each.

At 12:15 a.m. Oliver and Nancy Braman took two each while Nicholas took 14. All three took 10 each at 12:30 and 1 a.m.

The final notation, written in much larger and darker print, simply says, "Game over. Chad Campbell can explain. Are (sic) love and bond is greater than anytime."

The final handwritten note is a "last will and testament" written in a somewhat sloppy cursive handwriting on what appears to be a legal form. It says all three "wish to be cremated and put in one urn. No obituary and/or services are to be held."

It names a couple who "shall have the remains to keep safe and warm."

At the bottom, it says "We wish everyone to respect these wishes. What we want is to be cremated and put in urn. This includes rings, necklaces and

earrings."

The last sentence is written in a different style handwriting, likely Nicholas Braman's.

"I do not want Rebecca Jasinski to have any of my belongings," it says.

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Rescue attempts futile

Saturday, October 20, 2007

For years a mother tried to save her sons from what she says was her former husband's abusive home. Today, family members will have a memorial service for the youngest.

THERESA D. MCCLELLAN

and JOHN AGAR

THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

and THE SAGINAW NEWS

When their youngest son, Nicholas, was born nine years ago, the boy was as bald as cartoon character Elmer Fudd, earning him the nickname "Elmer," Rebecca Jasinski recalls.

The name stuck, but her marriage to Oliver Braman didn't.

"I signed the marriage license, and the next morning he said he owned me. It kinda went downhill from there," said Jasinski, who now lives in Saginaw, referring to their 1991 nuptials.

The marriage, which lasted until 1999, produced three sons. Nicholas was the family favorite, she recalled with tears.

Memories of what she describes as a fearful marriage now combine with her feelings of helplessness after police found Nicholas dead in his father's home near Stanton on Tuesday, along with the bodies of his 46-year-old father and 43-year-old stepmother, Nancy Kaczor-Braman, whose mother, Dorothy Kaczor, also lives in Saginaw.

Montcalm County authorities are calling it a

murder-suicide. Investigators believe Oliver Braman piped exhaust from a pickup into the home Sunday, and that the three of them had ingested 50 Tylenol PM pills.

Family members celebrated the youngster's life at a memorial service today at St. Mark Lutheran Church, 2565 N. Miller in Thomas Township.

Dorothy Kaczor said her daughter, who graduated from Bridgeport High School in 1982, used to baby-sit for Braman's children in Saginaw when he was married to Jasinski. Kaczor said her daughter would not have willingly allowed Nicholas to die.

"She loved children; she would never do this," Kaczor said. "She did what he said she had to do, and that was the way it was.

"He controlled her and forced her, absolutely. I thought he was very controlling."

Kaczor-Braman worked as a nanny after high school, then as a long-distance trucker traveling through the country and Canada. Case Funeral Home was helping with funeral arrangements for Kaczor-Braman, who was cremated Friday, her mother said.

"It's so horrible," said Nicholas' maternal grandmother Lillian Jasinski, 78, of Saginaw Township. "I'm having a lot of really bad crying spells when I think about my grandson. It's just so awful to deal with."

Rebecca Jasinski said she believes child welfare authorities could have prevented her son's death.

"I have been trying to tell that county (Montcalm) since 1999 that he was an abusive father and abusive husband. They said it was hearsay and would not listen," said Jasinski, 48.

Child welfare authorities were not available for comment.

Jasinski said her former husband's early threats of suicide turned into homicidal fantasies directed toward her, which he would describe in front of the children.

For the past eight years, their divorce has spawned court records filled with allegations of abuse, denials and counter-allegations.

Court records show the court-appointed guardian for Nicholas and his two brothers had concerns about both parents. She said the adults had no respect for court orders, and their behavior posed a risk to the children.

Both parents would get visitation, then keep the children away from the other parent for months, records show.

In 2004, when Jasinski heard allegations that Braman had abused her sons, she kept the boys in Saginaw for nearly nine months. She said she was charged with criminal contempt and lost custody in 2005.

"I was given a choice of going to jail and losing custody of the boys, or giving up custody of the boys and they would drop the charges. I knew that no matter what I did, they'd end up over there, and the best thing for them was to not think about me in jail," she said.

Since 2005, she said, she worked to get visitation rights to her sons.

Then, this August, she received a frantic call from her two older sons, who said their father had used an electric cattle prod on them. The 14- and 15-year-olds escaped his home, and she drove to pick them up.

"They looked emaciated, like beaten dogs. I saw ribs and spine," Jasinski said.

Given the allegations, she believed Child Protective Services would remove Nicholas from the home as well. But she said her efforts to reach him were stymied and, now that he is dead, she wants to know why.

"I want the people who could have protected my son to explain why they didn't," she said. "I want them held accountable."

She said her two older sons remain in shock about their brother's death.

"I'm trying to make them understand they did the right thing, they did get out. I told them it was the adults that failed." v

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Anguish, but no answers in service for dead boy

Sunday, October 21, 2007

By Theresa D. McClellan

The Grand Rapids Press

SAGINAW -- The mourners came to say goodbye to a little boy shown in family snapshots with missing teeth and smiling eyes.

That the 9-year-old is also believed to have penned a suicide note under the influence of his father was too much for even the pastor to understand.

"You came here for answers why," the Rev. Edward Meyer said during the service for Nicholas "Elmer" Braman in a church west of Saginaw on Saturday.

"I don't have that."

In a service filled with music and with sunshine streaming through stained-glass windows, friends and relatives remembered the blond-haired, blue-eyed boy whose death last week launched a state probe into why the tragedy occurred.

Nicholas was found dead of carbon monoxide poisoning and sleeping pills Tuesday in his Montcalm County home, along with his father, Oliver Braman, 46, and stepmother, Nancy Kaczor-Braman, 43. The father was facing jail for using a cattle prod on two older sons.

"I will not be (taken) from my Mom and Dad!!!!!! ever," said a note in a child's scrawl, bearing Nicholas' name, which police believe his father directed the boy to write.

"I'm going to stay with them forever and ever and ever and ever with them now. I take care of my mom and dad just like they take care of me," the note said.

Investigators in Montcalm County believe the three ingested more than 50 Tylenol PM pills each last Sunday, before the father piped exhaust from a pickup into their Douglass Township home near Stanton.

Authorities found them Tuesday, after the father failed to appear in court for using the cattle prod to discipline Nicholas' older brothers, ages 14 and 15, in August. The state Department of Human Services is investigating why its protective services workers in Montcalm County did not remove the youngest boy after the abuse became known.

'I couldn't even hold my baby'

Nicholas' remains were cremated. On Saturday, they rested in an urn beneath an ivory cloth at the front of the altar at St. Mark Lutheran Church in Thomas Township outside Saginaw.

It is the church where Nicholas was baptized when his father was married to Nicholas' mother, Rebecca Jasinski, from 1991 to 1999.

It is the same church where Rebecca Jasinski has sat in the pews and been so comforted by sermons and songs that she started collecting them for her own funeral, said Meyer, her pastor.

Instead, Rebecca used some of those sermons and songs for her youngest son.

She never got a chance to tell him goodbye.

"I couldn't even hold my baby boy," said the 48-year-old Jasinski, who has battled her ex-husband for custody for years.

Seated in the front pew, Jasinski held her head high, clutching a handkerchief. Sitting next to her were her oldest sons, Tyler Braman, 15, and Oliver Braman, 14. Their flight from their father's home to Jasinski's after he used a cattle prod led to the abuse investigation.

Also with the boys' mother was her daughter, Rachel Jasinski, 22.

Her shoulders slumped at one of the verses of "Amazing Grace."

Moments later, sunlight streamed through the church's stained-glass lilies as about 70 mourners sang -- or cried -- through the song "It is Well With My Soul."

A group of Nicholas' fourth-grade classmates from Stanton's Central Montcalm Upper Elementary School squirmed in their seats during the 85-minute service. Some laid their heads on their parents' laps; others listened intently.

Before the service, well-wishers filed past the children's handwritten messages to their friend. "I am so sorry" one child wrote in orange crayon. Another wrote: "you were good at socer (sic) I will miss you."

Pictures of Nicholas filled a posterboard outside the sanctuary.

There was the smiling baby with the cue-ball head that earned him his nickname "Elmer," as in the cartoon character Elmer Fudd. Another showed an older youngster laughing, his mouth missing teeth.

In his sermon, Meyer referenced the beauty and wonder of children. Nicholas' mother, he noted, "asked for a service of healing and forgiveness."

And he reminded the congregation of what it means to be a father.

"Our God is a loving, caring father, who will not harm us," Meyer said.

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Article published Oct 21, 2007

Mother fights to regain her son — But supporters of estranged husband say they can't believe allegations

By Lisa Roose-Church
DAILY PRESS & ARGUS

A young Texas mother whose 4-year-old son was yanked — she says stolen by her estranged husband — from her Livingston County bed on a chilly Sunday morning is fighting to get her son back.

Those who know her husband, however, say there is no way he threatened her or kidnapped his own child. They say, instead, the mother is running from a marijuana charge.

"I have never seen him do anything derogatory," Loving County (Texas) Sheriff Billy Hopper said of Dustin John Burrows, 32, who is facing warrants in Livingston County for home invasion and conspiracy to commit the crime as well as domestic violence.

Yet, Hopper, who has known Dustin Burrows since he was a child, said the 32-year-old man made mistakes as a teen — including convictions in a neighboring county for burning a cross before a football game and burglarizing a liquor store.

Michigan State Police personnel said Dustin Burrows, and his father, Richard Lee Burrows, 53, both of Mentone, Texas, and his brother, Levi Dylan Burrows, 31, of Baton Rouge, La., broke into an Oceola Township home on Oct. 14, physically assaulted 26-year-old Amber Burrows, threatened a male friend of hers, and took her son, Shaun, 4.

Two days later, Dustin Burrows filed a petition for divorce in Loving County District Court, alleging his wife has a history of "mental issues," and that she ran away to Michigan to meet a man she met on the Internet.

In his court filing, Dustin Burrows claims private investigators tracked Amber Burrows down in the "backwoods of Michigan," where he found her living with his son in a one-room place that was "very dirty."

"My son was dirty and smelled like he hadn't had a bath in several days," Dustin Burrows claims in his divorce papers. "I took our son and I brought him home. ... Amber's lack of judgment in taking Shaun across the United States to live with a man she's never met before is dangerous and neglectful. I also worry that she may run off with Shaun again, and I may not be able to find her next time."

Amber Burrows denies her husband's allegations. She said she gave Shaun a bath the day before his father took him, and while she did visit a mental health clinic in Texas, she said it was because the birth-control pills she was taking made her moody. She has since stopped taking that birth-control pill.

"They came up with a bunch of bull," she said. "I did not run off. I called him every night so Shaun could talk to his father and he came and took him. Every-thing is backward and inside-out."

The day after filing for divorce, Dustin Burrows and his father were arrested by Texas Department of Public Safety and Texas Ranger Division personnel at a home in Kermit, Texas, while Levi remained at large.

Amber Burrows, a postmaster in Mentone, Texas, is now fighting to get her son back.

She is desperate to find transportation to Texas, where she faces a custody hearing Friday in Reeves County. She has no vehicle, no driver's license, no money and no credit cards — all items she claims her husband, brother-in-law and father-in-law took when they left with her son.

"I'm afraid to step into Loving County," the 26-year-old said of her husband's hometown.

Loving County has a population of 67, with 13 of those residents living in the very small town of Mentone, county officials said.

"I fear for my life, but I want my baby back," Amber Burrows said.

She said her son is residing with her mother-in-law, Sherlene Burrows, in Mentone, and that worries her. However, Loving County court papers say the boy is in his father's custody and a temporary restraining order issued Tuesday prohibits Amber Burrows from visiting her son.

"The lady who has my son is a lady who raised her two sons to do this," she said. "I'm just sick that they think they can come up here and commit these felonies, go back and demand custody and make horrible accusations against me."

Numerous messages left for Sherlene and Richard Burrows as well as Dustin Burrows were not returned Friday. Attempts to find Levi Burrows have been unsuccessful.

Dustin Burrows' attorney, Cynthia Clack, said her client is interested to hear whether his wife will truthfully testify in Texas on Friday about the allegations she is making in Michigan. Clack said she could not comment on the allegations because she is not a criminal attorney and is not familiar with the allegations.

Amber and Dustin Burrows have been together for seven years, and married for one year. When she was pregnant with their son, she fled to Arizona because her husband was verbally and physically abusive toward her, she said.

"His parents called my son names like 'pee pee,' 'poo poo' and 'potato head,' " Amber Burrows said.

She returned to her husband when she was seven months pregnant, however, because she wanted her child to know his father.

"It was a horrible mistake," she said.

Amber Burrows said her husband's abusive nature did not change, but she tried to make it work for their son.

On Oct. 5, she said, she fled Texas when she learned her husband wanted a divorce and full custody of their child.

Her husband's supporters, however, say she left him for the other man and she fled from a pending drug charge.

According to Winkler County court records, Amber Burrows was arraigned in August 2004 for misdemeanor possession of less than 2 ounces of marijuana. The status of the case was not immediately known.

Still, she denies she fled to meet the other man or that she is fleeing the drug charge.

Amber Burrows was staying with friends at a home on Musson Road in Oceola Township when her husband's younger cousin called. The girl said she needed to get away from the family.

Amber Burrows, who said she mentored the younger girl, gave the girl the address and directions to the friend's home.

The next morning, Oct. 14, there was loud banging at the door and when a friend opened it, the three Burrows men "barged in," said Amber Burrows, who noted she was sleeping at the time, but woke up when she heard her husband's voice.

"They cut a gate to get in," she said.

Amber Burrows said that once her husband entered the place, he shook her violently, screaming, "Where the (expletive) is Shaun?"

She said the men yanked Shaun, who was lying next to his mother, out of bed and into 40-degree weather dressed only in his underwear.

Amber Burrows said her husband shoved her, then Levi Burrows "laid on top of me" so she could not get to her son. She kept screaming, "Don't hurt my baby," but they did not listen.

Hopper described Dustin Burrows as a small man, about 5 feet 5 inches and weighing less 100 pounds wet. He questioned whether Dustin Burrows could physically harm his wife, but did say brother Levi Burrows was a larger man, about 200 pounds.

Amber Burrows said as the men left, her father-in-law "whacked me in the ribs with a log," which police said was a tree branch they had picked up from the Oceola Township yard.

The men then fled, taking with them Amber Burrows' pickup as well as her driver's license and other personal papers that were in the pickup.

Beverly Hanson, Loving County district clerk, said there is no way Dustin Burrows did what his wife claims.

"I can't picture him doing that," she said in a Texas drawl.

Hanson said she's known Dustin Burrows since he was 12 years old. He is a "fantastic, wonderful" person, she said.

"There's a job open if he wants to come back," she said.

Amber Burrows said her husband's cruelty, however, only worsened after he took their son. She said a couple of days after the incident, she received a telephone call from a man claiming to be a private detective who needed her to sign papers to get her son back. She eagerly meet the man.

"What should have been a happy day turned into a nightmare," she said. "He served me with a restraining order. I can't see or talk to my son. I don't know how he's doing."

Meanwhile, Richard and Dustin Burrows were released Friday from Winkler County Jail in Kermit, about 15 minutes from the border of New Mexico, on a \$15,000 bond each, a sheriff's deputy there said.

Winkler County Deputy Jody Heflin said Texas law allows the men to be released from custody if they make bond, unless her department receives a warrant from Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm's office to hold them.

The father and son are fighting extradition to Michigan.

Livingston County Chief Assistant Prosecutor Dan Garber said his office has initiated the process to secure a governor's warrant for the men to be extradited to Michigan. However, that process can take up to two weeks.

"It's a shame these things happen, and I think it could be handled different, but when people have children involved they don't always do what is real smart," Hopper said.

Contact Daily Press & Argus reporter Lisa Roose-Church at (517) 552-2846 or at lrchurch@gannett.com.

Published October 22, 2007

Bill would bar Halloween activities for sex offenders

Parolees could not hand out candy, participate in events

Gregory Herbert
Capital News Service

State Rep. Fran Amos, R-Waterford, wants to ban any parolee who was convicted of a sex crime against a victim under 18 from all Halloween activities.

Her legislation would prohibit a parolee from "participating in any way in activities traditionally conducted during the evening of Halloween, including distributing candy or other items to children."

It also would ban a sex-crime parolee from leaving outside lights on or giving the impression that his or her house is occupied between 6 and 8 p.m. on Oct. 31, or any other locally designated Halloween celebration.

Gabe Basso, legislative director for Amos, said that he is not aware of a specific incident in Michigan that prompted the proposal, but it is important because parolees are "not ready to enter society, and because they are on parole, they are still considered a threat."

Co-sponsor State Rep. Rick Jones, R-Grand Ledge, a former Eaton County sheriff, said sex offenders shouldn't take part in activities involving children, such as trick-or-treating.

"In my opinion, someone who has been convicted of that should not be at a place where that is taking place," Jones said. "Pedophiles are never cured. Science has never found a cure."

Elizabeth Arnovits, executive director of the Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency, said the bill "is probably a good move politically," but it's unnecessary because such parolees already are ordered to stay away from

activities involving children - and even that it is a "reasonably unenforceable law."

And while Basso conceded that parolees are required to stay away from children, he said the proposal isn't redundant because there is "no law against children approaching them."

Basso also said the law would be a "self-enforcing issue" because people know and could find out where sex offenders live and monitor them.

Jones agreed that the proposed law would be easily enforceable.

He said police could simply pull up a computerized list of local parolees and monitor their homes.

In addition, he said, the bill would raise awareness of the issue and make parents more watchful of their children on Halloween.

The bill is pending in the House Judiciary Committee.

Tuuri conference in Flint focuses on child abuse

Posted by [Shantell M. Kirkendoll | The Flint Journal](#) October 18, 2007 07:06AM

GENESEE COUNTY -- The number of Genesee County children who authorities confirm have been abused or neglected nearly doubled from 1996 to 2004, to 3,618 children, according to child advocates.

But Martha Erickson, co-chair of the President's Initiative on Children, Youth and Families, said parents should beware taking an "us-and-them" attitude about how children are raised.

"It's a fine line," said Erickson, who gave the luncheon address Wednesday at the 35th annual Tuuri Day Conference in Flint. The theme was "Prevention of Child Maltreatment."

"The biggest challenge lies in the space between what we know and what we do," Erickson said.

Children who are ignored and left to console themselves may think a crisis is the only thing that will get their parents' attention -- or as adults, they may be dismissive of their own feelings and others', she said.

Whole communities play a part in children feeling nurtured, said Dr. Lawrence Reynolds, medical director of Mott Children's Health Center, which hosted the conference.

"Is the community safe enough to walk to the store or to school?" said Reynolds, a pediatrician. "The ability to do that can promote a child's health and well-being."

Local speakers also talked about the legal system and the effect of domestic violence on children. About 200 teachers, social workers, nurses and psychology experts attended.

Friday, October 19, 2007

Editorial

Repair, reinstate child health care program

Veto of expensive bill should prompt more affordable plan

The Detroit News

Now that the U.S. House has failed to override President George W. Bush's veto of its expansion of a child health insurance program, Congress should redraft more affordable legislation and reinstate the program.

It's hard to argue with the idea of making sure low-income children receive health care coverage. The program addressed in the vetoed bill, the State Child Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), was designed to make sure coverage was available to kids in families that made too much money to qualify for Medicaid, which is aimed at the indigent, but still couldn't afford private health insurance.

It is an intelligent approach, since it encourages families to stay in the work force rather than drop out and go on Medicaid.

In the 2006 fiscal year, the federal government spent \$5.4 billion on the program.

But the bill the president vetoed would have expanded the program by about \$7 billion per year during the next five years, for a total increase in funding of \$35 billion and a total cost of \$60 billion.

The president supported an expansion of the program by \$5 billion over five years and said he could support more, but not the additional \$35 billion.

Adopted in 1997, the program was fully instituted in 1999 at a cost of \$922 million. It has been rising ever since. In Michigan in 2006, the federal

government spent \$175 million, while the state added \$76.6 million, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation. The program is known as MICHild in Michigan.

The current program generally is aimed at families earning twice the federal poverty level, or about \$41,000 for a family of four, though some states make people with higher incomes eligible.

The vetoed bill would have raised the basic family income threshold to nearly \$62,000, bringing more middle-class families into the program. It would have raised the age when children are still able to receive federal coverage to 21.

It should be reinstated with an appropriate level of funding and focused on the children of the working poor.

The opportunity now is to retool a useful program at an affordable cost.



Camp offers health bill; activist says it's too little

Saturday, October 20, 2007

BARRIE BARBER

THE SAGINAW NEWS

and THE WASHINGTON POST

A congressman who voted against renewing the State Children's Health Insurance Program has introduced a scaled-down version that he says focuses on uninsured, poor youths.

U.S. Rep. Dave Camp, chief sponsor of the "Kids First Act," said his bill would provide "a safety net for those children at the margins."

The Midland Republican said the insurance expansion bill that President George W. Bush vetoed missed the mark. He also criticized using it to insure adults in Michigan.

He said his bill would cover an additional 1.3 million recipients.

The House failed to win a two-thirds majority Thursday to override the presidential veto. Camp, who has voted for the initiative in past years, sided with those who backed Bush in a 273-156 vote, or 14 fewer than needed.

U.S. Rep. Dale E. Kildee, a Flint Democrat who represents Saginaw, voted for the renewal of the bill and to override the veto.

Kildee had heard the "overwhelming support" from constituents.

"SCHIP ... benefits working families that earn too much to be covered by Medicaid but still struggle" to pay for health care, he said.

"My vote was to support a ... bill that would have provided health care to more than 80,000 uninsured children" in Michigan.

Terri L. Stangl, executive director of the Center for Civil Justice in Saginaw, lamented the failed override vote.

While any expansion helps, Camp's bill doesn't reach far enough, she said. Congress should keep its focus on providing health insurance to 10 million, Stangl said.

MiChild has a freeze on covering more adults, she added. Those that were covered earned \$3,500 or less a year in income, figures show.

"No child went uncovered because of that," Stangl said.

She said many families with breadwinners in the service industry or with part-time jobs need SCHIP.

"They can't get health insurance, so their children are going without unless a program like this is in place," she said.

The vetoed bill would have expanded the \$5 billion-a-year program by about \$7 billion a year over the next five years, for total funding of \$60 billion over the period. That would be enough to boost enrollment to 10 million children, up from 6.6 million, supporters say.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a California Democrat, said she is willing to talk to Bush but that Democrats will accept nothing less than a 10-million child expansion.

"That's not negotiable," she said.

Democrats suggested they could clarify that the program would not cover families with incomes more than 300 percent of the federal poverty level, about \$60,000 for a family of four. And they would tighten language to ensure the children of illegal immigrants could not receive benefits.

MIChild eligibility levels are up to 200 percent of poverty level, or about \$41,000 a year for family of four, said T.J. Bucholz, a spokesman at the state Department of Community Health. It insures 55,000 children and 38,000 adults.

Saginaw County had more than 12,000 children living in poverty in 2004, about 23.4 percent of all youths, Stangl said.

Camp's bill would set eligibility coverage at 200 percent of the poverty level and cost an additional \$14 billion over five years. Instead of a tax increase, the legislation would limit the federal matching rate for a state's Medicaid administrative expenses to 50 percent.

On the floor of the House, Camp questioned why so many adults were covered under MIChild: "How is it that, in my home state of Michigan, 87,000 eligible children don't have health care while 39,000 adults are in the program?"

However, Camp signed a letter in January 2004 that asked the federal government to give a waiver to use unspent SCHIP dollars to insure up to 70,000 childless adults in Michigan with inpatient, prescription drug and mental health help, Bucholz said. v

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SCHIP Debate Turns Into Attack On Schauer

MIRS

October 18, 2007

Senate Republicans turned debate over a resolution urging Congress to override President George W.

BUSH's veto on extended SCHIP funding into an attack on Senate Minority Leader Mark **SCHAUER** (D-Battle Creek) today, accusing him of using the issue to advance his congressional campaign.

"It's shameful to see my colleague from the 19th district kick off his congressional campaign in this

manner," said Sen. Alan **SANBORN** (R-Richmond), after stating that Schauer was using the issue to impress constituents.

Republicans claimed that Dems moved to discharge SR 117 from committee at the start of session so

Schauer could go back and tell constituents that he is an advocate for poor and uninsured children. This

funding pays for state health programs that help low-income children get health care.

The Republicans didn't go after Schauer while the discharge motion was on the floor. They waited to

bring it up until the "Statements" portion of the Senate agenda, which was where Sanborn made his

comments.

"This is not a place to run for Congress," Sanborn said.

Democrats immediately objected to Sanborn's comments.

"It's completely inappropriate to disparage a sitting member of the chamber during statements," said

Senate Minority Floor Leader Buzz **THOMAS** (D-Detroit)

Sanborn argued that he has a hard time considering those disparaging remarks when Democrats have

been blaming former Gov. John **ENGLER** and Bush for the state's economic problems. Sanborn added

that he appreciated his "colleagues'" desire to blame the state's problems on these two rather than doing

something about it. Democrats objected again.

Thomas read a section of the Senate rules suggesting that members should not attack the motives of other members.

"I did not name an individual member," Sanborn retorted, alluding to the fact that he said "colleague from the 19th district" rather than calling Schauer by name.

Sen. Nancy **CASSIS** (R-Novi) made similar comments, which were also objected by the Democrats and commented on, in a similar fashion, by Thomas.

"The filibuster is being used to direct attention away from their failed economic policy," Cassis said.

Later in the afternoon, Schauer sent out the following statement about today's SCHIP discussion:

"I'm disappointed that today a stubborn minority voted to provide political cover for President Bush

instead of voting to provide health care coverage to thousands of children.

The people of south central

Michigan, the children of Michigan, deserve better."

Schauer is running in the 7th Congressional district in south central Michigan against first-term U.S. Rep.

Tim **WALBERG** (R-Tipton).

The actual debate around the SCHIP issue itself was whether Congress should override the veto.

Democrats argue that Bush needs to provide additional funding for SCHIP, which provides funding for MI

Child in Michigan, because it will provide poor children with healthcare.

Republicans argue that the more

modest funding increase for SCHIP that Bush advocates would be adequate.

Sen. Gretchen **WHITMER** (D-East Lansing) wondered why the federal government can spend \$12

billion a month on the war, but wouldn't agree to spend \$9 million a year to insure poor children.

Democrats even tried a money-driven argument to get Republicans on board.

They argued that in the

long run, choosing not to extend the program would actually cost more because it will force sick children

to go the emergency room, which is much more expensive than a clinic.

This argument didn't work, however. Republicans held their ground that the federal bill is too costly. Sen.

Roger **KAHN** (R-Saginaw) supported a resolution in the spring urging Congress to back Bush's proposed SCHIP expansion that would have increased funding by 20 percent. Kahn said he supported that, but couldn't support spending that was beyond the "initial intent of SCHIP and MI Child." Democrats also magnified the fact that three Congressional Republicans — U.S. Reps. Vern **EHLERS** (R-Grand Rapids), Candice **MILLER** (R-Harrison Twp.) and Fred **UPTON** (R-St. Joseph) — were in favor of the override, but that didn't work either. By the end of session, the debate had moved from SCHIP, to Schauer's congressional campaign to Bush and the Iraq War. Several Republicans stood up to voice their opposition to comments some Democrats made about Bush and the war. The discharge issue was passed for the day on a party-line vote. Congress did take up the veto, but it was not overridden. Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** applauded the Michigan Congressional members who voted for the override. "I will continue to fight for all 158,000 uninsured Michigan children and look forward to continuing to work with Congress to pass children's health care legislation as soon as possible," she said.



Pantries strained by higher demand

Vanessa McCray and Sheri McWhirter
Record-Eagle staff writers

GAYLORD -- Hamburger sizzled in a skillet at Amber Brugger's Gaylord apartment; at a kitchen counter, she chopped onions, potatoes and carrots to make a stew.

All the ingredients came from the Otsego County Food Pantry in Gaylord, the place she turned to when she couldn't afford groceries.

Brugger, 21, had help peeling carrots from her daughter, Jersey, 4, who might not have eaten a nutritious meal that night without the pantry's supplies.

"It makes a huge difference. My daughter is not going to go to bed hungry," Brugger said.

Food pantries across northern Michigan report more people on their doorsteps, as job layoffs and an eroding economy take a toll on the area's struggling families. Increased demand in turn strains the pantries.

"Every one of them said that their shelves are getting low," said Val Stone of the Northwest Food Coalition.

From the seasonal ebb of tourism in Traverse City to shuttered factories in Gaylord, the region's economic challenges make it difficult to put food on the table. Pricey rental rates, gasoline costs, and winter's approach create hardship for residents and place a burgeoning burden on thinning pantry supplies.

The food coalition represents about 30 food pantries in a six-county area. Pantry visits were up this summer and the number jumped by dozens at many locations from August to September, Stone said. She's bracing for more of the same as freezing weather races in.

"The minute it turns cold, then we see a big increase in the pantries because people are saying, 'I can't afford to buy food and fuel,' " said Stone.

Brugger and Jersey's father, Jon Traxler, 23, made two trips downstate to visit Traxler's mother in the hospital. Gas and food costs dried up the grocery fund, they said. Brugger works at Wal-Mart and Traxler does maintenance at a local golf and ski resort. They live paycheck-to-paycheck and decided to move to Midland in February to be closer to family.

"There are people out there who really need the help, and it's important to them," Traxler said.

'Just plain hurting'

A wave of need rolls across the north, leaving holes large and small. It reached Traverse City, where The Salvation Army showed a 7 percent increase in pantry users this year; in Leelanau County, where a charity lost a grant to buy holiday turkeys and hams; and in Gaylord, rocked by factory closings.

The tide of tough times swept up Glen Wilson of Bellaire. He recently picked up a box of groceries from the Mancelona Food Pantry, one of 500 people each month who go there for free food. It's been a long time since he's had to do that.

"We need food. There's nothing in the fridge or the cupboards," he said. "We were doing good for a while."

Wilson, 25, has a criminal record, a black mark that makes it difficult for him to find employment. His girlfriend works at a nearby resort, but it's often not enough to pay the bills, put gas in the cars and feed the family, including his three- and four-year-old sons.

"A lot of times we take them to my parents' house, and they'll stay for a couple of weeks at a time," he said.

Wilson's troubles aren't unique.

Pantries strained by higher demand

"For most of our clients, there's just no work, or minimum wage work that's not enough to support a family," said Kathy Reid, director of the Care and Share Food Pantry in East Jordan in Charlevoix County. "Our numbers have tripled from a year ago."

They once served between 30 and 35 families a month, but are now nearing 100. That could in part be due to its new, more visible site, but Reid believes it's mostly the fault of the economy.

"There are more people out of work with the plant closings," said Ron Chavey, director of the Salvation Army in Gaylord and a board member for the Otsego County Food Pantry. "They're just plain hurting. I think it's the layoffs and the fact we have so many minimum wage jobs here."

In Gaylord, a Georgia-Pacific particleboard factory closed in March 2006, and this year brought news of the Kimball Electronics plant closure. Those shops amounted to more than 400 manufacturing jobs.

Last year, there were 4,437 people served at the Otsego pantry. So far this year, the number is 3,705. Chavey expects to top those figures by hundreds at year's end.

Leelanau Christian Neighbors runs pantries in Suttons Bay and Northport, where food requests have almost doubled. President Jane Nichols called it a "tremendous increase" and is concerned about providing Christmas and Thanksgiving dinners after losing funding.

Trying to make do

Many food pantries rely on drives and donations to keep up with growing demand and are finding new ways to meet the need.

The United Way of Northwest Michigan this fall launched a food drive tied to its annual fundraiser. The new focus is borne of United Way's desire to raise resources to meet the community's immediate needs, said Executive Director Pamela Prairie.

"There's nothing like seeing the semi being loaded with food and personal hygiene items, as opposed to the more nebulous pledge to the campaign," she said. "They both really help to achieve or address the need ... (but) the other is a lot easier to see and touch."

Recent donations helped the Kalkaska Area Interfaith Resources pantry keep pace with demand, but there's "definitely an increase" in visits, said Executive Director Deborah Harmon.

Nearly 40,000 pounds of local produce has been distributed this year to about 30 pantries by the Fresh Food Partnership, now in its fifth growing season. The group purchases food from about 20 local farmers and will distribute it through the end of November. Apples, potatoes, onions, cabbage, winter squash and carrots are among the current offerings.

Program Coordinator Laura Otwell noted a "growing need" from pantries, and the partnership increased its provisions.

The Salvation Army pantry in Traverse City is open five days a week, and its shelves were "pretty bare" recently, said Director of Social Services Dave Gibbons.

"We have to do what we have to do," Gibbons said. "If we get low enough, we buy the food, and people are generally kind this time of year and food donations do start coming in."

Back in their Gaylord apartment, Brugger and Traxler have enough groceries to last a few weeks: five boxes of cereal, three pounds of hamburger, two dozen eggs, hot dogs, chicken, bread, carrots, potatoes, milk, oatmeal, raisins, egg noodles and dozens of canned vegetables, fruit and juice.

"It's not difficult to make a balanced, nutritious meal with the combination of canned and fresh food they give you," Brugger said.

She said it's thanks to the charity of others that she can worry less about how to feed her child for a while. Those who can afford to donate to food pantries should do so, she said.

"In times of need, giving is needed. It's good karma. It will come back to you," Brugger said.

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Photos



Four-year-old Jersey Traxler holds onto her mother, Amber Brugger, who stirs a hamburger stew for dinner at their home in Gaylord. Brugger and Jersey-s dad, Jon Traxler, recently accepted donated food from the Otsego County Food Pantry after falling short on funds to purchase groceries. Record-Eagle



Edith Plumb, assistant director at the Mancelona Food Pantry, rings up a total for customer Mary Ruthruff.



Those in need are individuals and families

By Vanessa McCray

TRAVERSE CITY -- It's pantry day at St. Patrick Catholic Church.

Food is stashed in a small room, just large enough to fit several volunteers who replenish the half-full shelves. Church parishioners recently held a food drive, and there are many bags to unpack, boxes to sort, cans to straighten.

Shelves line two walls. Here is space for shampoo and soap, boxes of pudding and pasta, canned peaches and pitted cherries.

"We are always on the lookout for food, always taking donations and asking for them," said Lisa Kelderhouse, church office administrator.

The Traverse City parish runs one of dozens of area church pantries, and opens its doors on Tuesdays and Thursdays for two hours at a time. Around 10 a.m., Kelderhouse surveys the stock.

A pack of caramel apples goes into the shopping cart of the first pantry visitor. She is greeted by Kelderhouse, who twists her fingers into shapes of letters, runs off and returns with a loaf of bread and other groceries.

Kelderhouse took courses in sign language and Spanish to better communicate with hearing-impaired and Spanish-speaking pantry users.

A phone rings somewhere, and Kelderhouse uses a headset clipped to her ear to answer a call from Love In The Name of Christ. The ministry refers the needy to various food pantries. Those who live near the West Silver Lake Road church are sent to St. Patrick's pantry. The referrals eliminate abuses, and the church also monitors the frequency of visits by those who seek food.

Pantry visitors record their name and household size and leave with a set list of groceries.

A family of four receives bags that contain one can each of tomatoes, beans, meat, and potatoes; two soups, fruits, tuna cans and boxes of macaroni and cheese; four cans of vegetables and one juice, peanut butter, pancake mix, dry soup, spaghetti and sauce, cereal, pasta meal, bag of cookies, instant potatoes, jelly, syrup, crackers, rice, baked good or gelatin and toilet paper.

People may select other items not included in the basic package if they are available.

Maria Montano's pantry pick-up will feed her family of six for more than a week. She and her husband are migrant workers who for years have seasonally travelled to the area from Texas. Recent rain halted farm work. Sometimes the family has money to pay all the bills, but it depends on the whims of weather.

"Right now, we are low income," said Montano.

She's thankful for the St. Patrick's pantry.

"They help me out when I need it," she said.

Susanne Redburn volunteered for the church's pantry for about seven years and noticed more people using the pantry lately.

"When I first used to be here, there were times when no one came in. I don't think we've had one of those days in a while," Redburn said.

Three people are served within forty minutes of the pantry's opening. Diane Green is among them. The Traverse City woman donates food when she has extra and helps out at another pantry. On this day, the retiree stops by to get food.

"Finances are tight. You have to get help somewhere," Green said. "You shouldn't feel ashamed, because it's there to help people who need the help."

Those in need are individuals and families

She believes residents should give first to their own community and said basic, "healthy" food is always an appreciated pantry donation. Green planned to make soup and other made-to-last foods out of the goods she picked up.

Pantry coordinator Mary Clulo said the poor economy shows in the use of the pantry. So far this year, the pantry served 1,100 people, some more than once.

Near the end of the pantry hours, the volunteers are almost finished unpacking donated items. A five-pound bag of egg noodles waits to be stored. Four boxes of buttermilk pancake mix rest in a plastic bag on the floor. The neat shelves are in good supply, though Kelderhouse knows it is temporary. The current stock will last about a month, she estimated.

Without a steady diet of donations, the shelves, like stomachs, always return to empty.

To donate to St. Patrick's pantry contact the church at (231) 943-4633. To get a referral to use the pantry contact Love In The Name of Christ at (231) 941-5683.

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Photos



Volunteers Chuck Jennings, front, Susanne Redburn and her son Aaron, 13, stock the food pantry at St. Patrick-s Catholic Church. Record-Eagle



'We-re so excited to have this food, these shelves were so bare,' said St. Patrick-s office manager Lisa Kelderhouse, right, with volunteer Susanne Redburn as the two organize food items donated to the church-s food pantry. Record-Eagle



Volunteers Susanne Redburn and Chuck Jennings stock the St. Patrick-s Catholic Church pantry. Record-Eagle



THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

'Street' court helps homeless offenders

Sunday, October 21, 2007

BY ART AISNER

The Ann Arbor News

Fifth District Court Judge Elizabeth Pollard Hines was one of three justices recently appointed to the executive committee of the American Judges Association, the largest independent judicial association in the United States that also includes judges from Canada and Mexico. The News spoke with her about the appointment and how her involvement with the AJA has led to local initiatives, including the Street Outreach Court, which assists area homeless people.

Q: How long is the appointment for and what have you gained from your involvement in the association?

A: It is a one-year appointment that coincides with the tenure of the association president. I've been part of the organization since becoming a judge in 1993 and I've learned so much and made so many contacts that I think benefited the courts in our county through information-sharing and training opportunities.

It's also opened my eyes to different ways of doing business, such as problem solving courts of which we have three in Washtenaw County: Sobriety Court, specialized domestic violence court and Street Outreach Court.

Q: You're the presiding judge and have been heavily involved with Street Outreach Court. What is it?

A: Washtenaw County's version of a homeless court, which is a collaborative community effort involving many people from municipalities, police agencies, defense attorneys, the prosecutor's office and so many advocacy agencies we're lucky to have helping the homeless in this community. Our first session was Oct. 19 of 2005.

Q: How does it work?

A: It's designed to help non-violent offenders with outstanding warrants who, if they choose, work with an agency to get back on their feet.

If that agency believes they are really trying, they can refer the case to us and then design an action plan to address whatever problem they need to address to get back on their feet, whether it's literacy, job training or substance abuse.

If they comply, than I can either close the case or dismiss it, if the prosecutor agrees, with credit for what they did, rather than assess fines we'll never collect.

Q: How do participants benefit? How does the court and the public benefit?

A: To me it's a win, win, win situation. You're saving tax dollars by not sending people to jail for low-level offenses and you're keeping people from continuing to engage in criminal behavior. And, most importantly, you're actually helping people and encouraging them on the path of self-sufficiency.

Q: How does this fit into the county's 10-year plan to eliminate homelessness?

A: The district courts could play a part in that because we see so many people on these low-level misdemeanor offenses that it's a revolving door. Through AJA contacts, I got information and began calling

officials to put it together.

People who have been afraid to come to court leave with a fresh start, and I think we've created a system where we can help people who are helping themselves get back on their feet.

Q: What's next for the program?

A: We're developing a survey to measure people's attitudes coming into court and then when they leave to see if they think the program is working. ... There are so many people and agencies that have asked to help and I think we can do a lot more. It's just a matter of making time to sit down and think about next steps to help people that have come through the system.

Art Aisner can be reached at aaisner@annarbornews.com or 734-994-6823.

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Sunday, October 21, 2007

Editorial

No choice left except to make tough budget cuts

The Detroit News

Gov. Jennifer Granholm and state lawmakers are acting as if they have some choice other than to balance the state budget before the Oct. 31 deadline by cutting \$450 million in spending. They don't.

Their only option is to get the budget ax out and start chopping. There's just 10 days left before the continuation appropriation runs out and the government faces another shutdown deadline. Surely, the governor and lawmakers have learned from the mess they made out of the tax hike bill that passing complex legislation in a matter of minutes is not the best way to set policy.

Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop, R-Rochester, says he agreed to support tax increases in exchange for promises of specific spending cuts, particularly in the Corrections and **Human Services** budgets. Those are sensible places to look for savings, since they are the two biggest consumers of government dollars.

Bishop favors privatizing prison services to cut costs. Great idea. Do it. But Republicans will also have to concede to reforming sentencing guidelines to reduce the number of people behind bars, as Granholm proposes. The Mackinac Center in Midland says that if two-thirds of the governor's sentencing changes were adopted, the savings would be \$69 million.

Republicans also say they were promised savings in welfare programs and want to achieve those through outsourcing as well, specifically privatizing foster care services. If the same services can be delivered at a lower cost, the state has an obligation to make the switch.

Work force reductions are nearly always a first step in the private sector when a business finds its costs are higher than its revenues. And yet the state, throughout this nearly seven year-long fiscal crisis, has never done a top to bottom review of its payroll to determine if every worker being paid by taxpayers is essential to the operation of government.

The governor claims she has slashed 9,000 jobs from the payroll. But the state's Civil Service Web site shows that in December 2002, the month before Granholm took office, there were 52,608 state employees.

As of January, 2007, according to that same Web site, there were 53,024 state employees, an increase of or more than 600.

State employees also got a pay hike this year. Repealing it would save \$150 million.

Throughout this long year of budget negotiations -- and for the prior six years of deficit budgets -- there's not been a sense of urgency to address the problem head-on. And with the clock once again ticking, there still isn't.

There are no more trick cards to play. The state's reserve funds have been emptied by politicians seeking to avoid tough choices.

The only option left is to start cutting. It's better to finish that messy job now than to wait until 10 minutes to midnight on Oct. 31.

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Article published Oct 20, 2007

Lansing slow to finish fixing state budget

Less than two weeks left before government could shut down again

Michigan lawmakers don't seem in any big hurry to finish resolving the state's budget. After opting for more taxes to resolve \$1.35 billion's worth of the \$1.75 billion deficit, they still have to settle the remaining \$433 million deficit.

The Oct. 1 tax vote only won a 30-day moratorium on the government's shutdown. The clock is ticking. With less than two weeks left, state lawmakers have yet to agree on an answer to the deficit. If past practice is the standard, the Legislature won't come up with a remedy until the deadline passes and the government shuts down. And when that occurs, no one should be surprised when they suddenly find a way to raise taxes again.

Republicans and Democrats are at an impasse over what to cut. Medicaid, a federal and state health care program that serves the poor, and the Michigan Department of Human Services, which manages welfare payments and day-care assistance for low-income parents, appear the key points of contention.

It would be wrong to balance the budget on the backs of the state's most vulnerable residents. It would be irresponsible, however, to subject Michigan residents to another partial government shutdown.

Leadership must overcome partisan bickering - and Lansing has less than two weeks to do so.



Kent County to build new Human Services complex

Monday, October 22, 2007

By Ken Kolker

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Decorative grass and bushes line the entryway of the old Paul I. Phillips Building, where hundreds of Kent County Department of Human Services welfare recipients meet with caseworkers about the needs of their families.

Inside the front door of the former high school, however, fluorescent lights fight against dark walls and dark plastic chairs in a waiting room that looks anything but friendly.

"There's a gloom to it," said Lisa McCarthy, 43, of Grand Rapids, as she hurried through the door to meet her caseworker.

She was pleased to learn the building will be replaced by a \$27 million Kent County Human Services Complex a few blocks away.

"It's a good thing," she said. "I don't think this facility is good for people."

Kent County officials on Oct. 29 will hold a groundbreaking ceremony for the new facility that will combine several social service agencies under one roof.

The county, working with the state and the city of Grand Rapids, will build the facility on the site of the Sheldon Complex, 121 Franklin St. SE, which will be demolished.

The 137,000-square-foot building is expected to open in June 2009.

Among the programs it will house are the Department of Human Services (formerly Family Independence Agency), which provides public assistance; a health clinic; and jobs programs, including ACSET and Michigan Works.

The state's Children and Adult Protective Services office, now housed behind the Meijer store in Cascade Township, also will move there.

"It will be almost like one-stop shopping in terms of health, social services and welfare," said Kent County Commissioner Paul Mayhue. "They could call it the Department of Health, Human Services and Welfare."

About 70 percent of Human Services clients live within three miles of the new site, county officials said.

The current DHS building on Franklin was built in 1948 as Central Christian High School, which closed in the late 1960s.

"When you walk in the door of the current building, it's kind of old and gray," Mayhue said.

"The atmosphere, it's a tense atmosphere. It's not conducive to me wanting to spill my guts, to talk about my real problems."

Mayhue said a new building will brighten the atmosphere for both DHS workers and clients.

The county issued bonds to pay for the project and will rent much of the building to the state. The state has signed a 20-year lease.

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DHS Employee Faces Corruption Charge

MIRS

October 18, 2007

A Department of Human Services (DHS) is facing corruption charges for allegedly speeding up adult foster care licenses for under-the-table cash payments by four to 10 months. Today, Attorney General Mike **COX** announced the arrest of Savannah **WOODS**, 53, of Detroit. Woods worked as an Adult Foster Care consultant for the DHS Office of Children & Adult Licensing. One of the duties assigned to Woods was to receive and process applications for adult foster care licenses.

"Public corruption, bribery and forgery are always serious charges, but they are even more heinous when they risk putting Michigan citizens in danger," said Cox. "My office is committed to cracking down on public corruption."

An investigation by the Attorney General's office and the Office of Inspector General within DHS revealed that Woods would approach potential adult foster care applicants and offer them her "consulting services" for a fee of \$4,000, often paid in cash. Her private "consulting service" mirrored the duties she was supposed to provide for free on behalf of the State of Michigan. However, she would often improperly expedite applicants who paid her "consulting fee." Applications that normally took 6-12 months to approve were approved in less than two months.

It is further alleged that Woods counterfeited documents such as certificates of compliance. The investigation also revealed that she helped her clients forge important documentation, such as G.E.D. diplomas. The forged documents would eventually be turned in as a part of an application, which Woods would later approve.

Attorney General investigators arrested Woods in Detroit this morning. Woods was scheduled to be

arraigned today in the 36th District Court in Detroit. The charges stem from an investigation conducted

by DHS, Office of the Inspector General and was handed over to the Attorney General's office to

investigate. She will be charged with:

- one count of Conducting a Criminal Enterprise, a 24-year felony
- three counts of a Public Officer Accepting a Bribe, a 10-year felony
- three counts of Misconduct in Office, a 5-year felony
- three counts of Forgery, a 14-year felony

A criminal charge is merely an accusation, and the defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

351 State Employees Make \$110K Plus

MIRS

October 19, 2007

Five times as many state employees are making at least \$110,000 a year or more in 2007 than three years ago, according to salary information compiled by MIRS. State officials say the increase is a symptom of the recent cost-of-living increases pushing state employees who had made been making in the \$100,000 range to the next level.

Not including state department heads, 351 state employees make \$110,000 a year or more in 2007, up from the 62 that made that salary or more in 2004. Like in 2004, most of these employees are in the medical profession - physicians or psychiatrists working for the Department of Community Health (DCH) or Department of Corrections (DOC). They represent six-tenths of one percent of the state workforce.

In fact, a DCH psychiatrist director in Wayne County and a DOC physician manager share the title of highest-paid state employee. Both are paid a \$161,757-a-year salary. Gov. Jennifer GRANHOLM makes \$177,000 a year, but voluntarily returns 5 percent of her salary back to the state. Supreme Court justices make \$164,610 a year.

Five classified state employees in DCH and DOC made the state-high salary of \$146,535 in 2004, roughly 10 percent less than the 2007 high salary.

Department of Civil Service (DCS) Spokesman Joe SLIVENSKY said the bump from \$146,535 to \$161,757 is reflective of the 2-to 4-percent salary increases given to all state employees over the last three years, not a sign that the state is hiring a bunch of new employees at higher salaries.

In fact, state employment is down by 1,000 employees over the last three years, Slivensky said.

Of the 145 DCH employees making more than \$100,000, roughly a third (51) have "administrator" titles. DCH Spokesman T.J. BUCHOLZ made no

apologies for the salaries paid to the state's "high-quality" physicians, who he says deserve every dollar they earn.

"We work very hard to recruit high-caliber physicians, who could make three to four times more in the private sector," Bucholz said. "These are people with decades of training and we have to do our best to keep employees of high caliber."

As far as the administrator salaries, Bucholz said DCH is a "large and diverse organization and our administrators go above and beyond what we expect from them."

Next to DCH, the Attorney General's office has the most employees making at least \$100,000 a year (112). In fact, 12 attorneys on staff make more than the \$124,900 earned a year by Attorney General Mike COX, whose salary is capped. Only Secretary of State Terri Lynn LAND's chief deputy director earns more a year than her \$124,900-a-year salary.

Another interesting fact extracted from the state salary information: 2,356 state employees, roughly 4 percent of the state's workforce of 53,000 employees, earn salaries above the \$78,650 a year a state lawmaker not in leadership earns. The total salary for all of these employees is \$227.587 million.

Most of these state employees making over the \$79,000-a-year level are physicians, psychiatrists, attorneys and upper-level management, who have significant numbers of people reporting to them, Slivensky said.

"There's a lot of responsibility that goes with that territory," Slivensky said. "I'm not saying a legislator is not an important job, but it's also a fact that a legislator hasn't had a pay increase since January 2001."

All told, 669 non-department head state employees make more than \$100,000 a year. The following is a breakdown by department.

Agriculture - 8
Attorney General - 112
Auditor General - 11
Civil Rights - 5
DCS - 12

DCH - 145
DOC - 100
Department of Education - 11
Department of Environmental Quality - 18
Department of History, Arts and Libraries - 6
House of Representatives - 7
Human Services - 43
Department of Information Technology - 32
Legislative Services - 8
Department of Management and Budget - 30
Department of Military and Veterans Affairs - 9
Department of Natural Resources - 12
Department of State - 24
Senate - 9
Michigan State Police - 24
Strategic Fund - 13
Department of Transportation - 39